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United Nations

Commission on Sustainable Development

Report on the twentieth session (13 May 2011 and 20 September 2013)

Economic and Social Council
Official Records, 2013
Supplement No. 9

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Note

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Chapter I

Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention

Draft decision recommended by the Commission for adoption by the Council

1. The Commission on Sustainable Development recommends to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of the following draft decision:

Draft decision
Adoption of the report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on its twentieth session

The Economic and Social Council takes note of the report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on its twentieth session.

Chapter II

Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the way forward

2. At its 2nd meeting, on 20 September 2013, the Commission considered item 3 of its agenda, entitled "Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the way forward", and held a high-level dialogue.

3. The high-level dialogue was opened with a short commemorative video presentation of images on the history, accomplishments and legacy of the Commission.

4. At the same meeting, the Commission heard a videotaped statement by Valli Moosa (South Africa), Chair of the eleventh session of the Commission.

5. Also at the same meeting, the Commission heard presentations by the following panellists: Bedrich Moldan (Czech Republic), Chair of the ninth session of the Commission; Achim Steiner, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme; the Director of the Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Braulio Dias, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity; and Barbara Adams, Senior Policy Adviser, Global Policy Forum.

6. Following the presentations by the panellists, statements were made by the representatives of Norway, Italy, Japan and Malaysia, and by the observers for Fiji (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), the Islamic Republic of Iran and Switzerland. A statement was also made by the observer for the European Union.

7. Statements were also made by the representatives of the following major groups: women; non-governmental organizations; business and industry; and children and youth.

8. The Chair's summary of the key points of the dialogue is contained in the annex to the present report.

Chapter III

Conclusion of the work of the Commission on its twentieth session

9. At its 2nd meeting, on 20 September 2013, the Commission was informed that in Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/19 of 24 July 2013, the Council requested the Commission to conclude its work at its twentieth session on 20 September 2013 and to transmit its final report to the Council on that day, and decided to abolish the Commission with effect from the conclusion of its twentieth session, on 20 September 2013.

Chapter IV

Adoption of the report of the Commission on its twentieth session

10. At its 2nd meeting, on 20 September 2013, the Commission had before it the draft report on organizational and other matters of its twentieth session (E/CN.17/2013/L.1).

11. At the same meeting, the Commission adopted the draft report (see chap. I, draft decision).

12. Also at its 2nd meeting, the Commission was informed that the Chair's summary of the key points of the high-level dialogue on "Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the way forward" would be finalized by the Bureau in collaboration with the Secretariat and included in the final report of the Commission on its twentieth session to be transmitted to the Economic and Social Council later on the same day, in accordance with Council resolution 2013/19 of 24 July 2013 (see chap. III).

Chapter V
Organizational and other matters

A. Opening and duration of the session

13. The Commission held its twentieth session on 13 May 2011 and 20 September 2013. It held two plenary meetings. At the 1st meeting, on 13 May 2011, the Chair of the nineteenth session, László Borbély (Romania), opened the session and made a statement.

14. At the same meeting, Noel Sinclair, the Deputy Chef de Cabinet of the Office of the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, made a statement on behalf of John W. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda), the President of the Assembly.

15. Also at the 1st meeting, a statement was made by Wu Hongbo, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

16. Also at the same meeting, a statement was made by João Felipe Scarpelini, the Representative of Major Groups.

B. Election of officers

17. At its 1st meeting, on 13 May 2011, the Commission elected the following members of the Bureau, by acclamation:

Chair:

Mazhit Turmagambetov (Kazakhstan)

Vice-Chair:

Bosiljka Vuković (Montenegro)

18. At its 2nd meeting, on 20 September 2013, the Commission elected, by acclamation, Bektas Mukhamejanov, Vice-Minister of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan, to replace Mazhit Turmagambetov (Kazakhstan), as Chair of the twentieth session of the Commission.

19. At the same meeting, the Commission also elected, by acclamation, Miloš Nikolić (Montenegro) to continue with the unexpired term of Bosiljka Vuković (Montenegro), and Paolo Soprano (Italy), as Vice-Chairs of the Commission for its twentieth session.

20. Also at the same meeting, the Commission was informed that the Vice-Chair, Paolo Soprano (Italy), would also assume the responsibilities of Rapporteur.

C. Agenda and organization of work

21. At its 2nd meeting, the Commission adopted the revised provisional agenda for its twentieth session, as contained in document E/CN.17/2013/1, and approved its organization of work, which was circulated during the meeting and made available on the Commission's website as an informal paper in English only. The agenda was as follows:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the way forward.
4. Conclusion of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.
5. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its twentieth session.

D. Attendance

22. The session was attended by representatives of the 53 States members of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Observers for other States members of the United Nations and for the European Union, representatives of organizations of the United Nations system and observers for intergovernmental, non-governmental and other organizations also attended. A list of participants will be issued in document E/CN.17/2013/INF/1.

E. Documentation

23. The documents before the Commission at its twentieth session are posted on the website of the Division for Sustainable Development (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1211).

Annex

Chair's summary of the key points of the high-level dialogue on "Lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the way forward"

1. The high-level interactive dialogue was held during the twentieth and last session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. As decided at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro from 20 to 22 June 2012, the new High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will replace the Commission. It will meet for the first time on 24 September 2013, a few days after the session of the Commission.

2. The interactive dialogue commenced with the projection of a commemorative video celebrating the legacy of the Commission and recollecting the important accomplishments of the Commission during its 20 years of existence. It also set the stage for the inauguration of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development as the successor of the Commission. The commemorative video can be accessed at http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/.

3. Valli Moosa, Chair of the Board of the World Wildlife Fund, South Africa, and Chair of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eleventh session, addressed the meeting through a recorded video. He reflected that, while in the early days of the Commission, only environmental ministers had been interested in sustainable development, currently that had changed, largely owing to the Commission's work to link the environmental dimension with its social and economic counterparts. He highlighted the growing accountability of large corporations for their actions and stewardship of the environment, noting that the practice of corporate social responsibility was rare in the very recent past. Although there were weaknesses and goals not yet achieved, he called upon participants to carry their successes forward and ensure continued commitment to sustainable development.

4. Bedrich Moldan, Director of Charles University, Prague, and Chair of the Commission at its ninth session, said one task — if not the main task — of the Commission was to monitor the implementation of Agenda 21. He discussed the progression of formulating indicators of sustainable development, which the Commission had undertaken from 1996 until 2006, recalling that it had not been easy to convince colleagues to develop that set of indicators. He remarked that currently it had become clear that those indicators were very useful. The involvement of the scientific and technological community in the development of measurements and indicators correlated directly with the development of policies at the global level. The notion of planetary boundaries was also increasingly central to sustainable development. He concluded that an analysis of the Commission's impacts over 20 years and its legacy should help to bolster the success of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

5. Achim Steiner, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), underscored the fact that the major groups had been a central part of the identity and passion of the Commission. The closure of the Commission was but an evolutionary step, part of the progress whereby that functional body was being raised to a higher and more effective

political level. It was thus a reason to celebrate. He noted that the genesis of sustainable development could be traced to the publication in 1980 of *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development* (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, UNEP, World Wildlife Fund), which included issues of intra- and intergenerational equity that still underpinned the responsibility of sustainable development. Environmental roots were part of the constraints and legacy of the Commission, part of a new frontier and an effort to develop a different standard of development. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development had succeeded in elevating sustainable development above the notion of "three pillars" — which contributed to "silo thinking" and trade-offs — to encompass a more integrated set of ideas, in particular with regard to sustainable consumption and production. New institutional frameworks had been born as a result of the Conference, including the strengthening of UNEP, where universal membership had created a United Nations environmental assembly. He highlighted the work of the Programme, building on the science-policy interface and forming partnerships in support of Government reform, and expressed his commitment to future successes.

6. The Director of the Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, recalled the euphoria and excitement of the days when the Commission on Sustainable Development had been established, noting that negotiations had been lengthy and arduous, and some countries had had strong objections to creating a new United Nations body. Ultimately, it had been the engagement and energy of civil society that had made the difference; its unwavering commitment had convinced member States to embark on that new endeavour. The Rio Conference had been marked by unprecedented participation of civil society and the creation of the Commission had provided a home to allow its continued involvement. He highlighted key lessons learned from 20 years of the Commission's existence and recommendations for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Those remarks related to increasing the effectiveness of review and monitoring progress through better data collection and by balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development through better representation, by preserving the traditions of multi-stakeholder inclusiveness and by enhancing the science-policy interface to place science in the service of the poor.

7. Braulio Dias, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity, reviewed his participation in discussions that had created the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and the United Nations Forum on Forests. He said that the launch of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the formulation of sustainable development goals was an important moment to promote the mainstreaming of biodiversity and link it to issues of poverty eradication, food security, access to water, health, the promotion of human well-being and adaptation to climate change. He called upon the new Forum to continue the good work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and to create an enabling environment for biodiversity issues.

8. Barbara Adams, Senior Policy Adviser, Global Policy Forum, reflected on the success of the Commission on Sustainable Development in promoting the notion of sustainable development that was universal and captured the interest of people at all levels, and supported reviving the tradition of more integrated and substantive multi-stakeholder dialogues. As the Commission had drifted towards environmental issues, it had lost vital constituencies of actors to trade and climate change

negotiations, and had neglected to examine the complex roles of the international financial institutions, the Human Rights Council and the trade and investment regimes, which were all connected to sustainable development implementation. She recommended that the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development do more to address investment agreements that undermined sustainable development; engage the G-20 countries on issues of decent work, job creation and policies that enabled States to meet their rights obligations; and increase the focus on women's rights, accountability frameworks and equity. Goals and targets should provide incentives to address areas for long-term social change, measure progress beyond gross domestic product and incorporate reporting mechanisms. Since the United Nations was increasingly looking to partnerships as part of its implementation strategy, she suggested that the Secretary-General's proposed multi-stakeholder initiative for a partnership facility might report to the High-level Political Forum, challenged participants to be aware of areas where conflicts of interest must be addressed and proposed that the Forum should adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to agenda-setting.

9. During the interactive discussion, Fiji (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, Switzerland, the European Union and representatives of major groups of women, non-governmental organizations, business and industry, and children and youth made comments.

10. A key message of the debate was that the new High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development should build on the achievements and lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development so as to discharge the functions assigned to it at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

11. All the speakers referred to the Commission's many achievements and lessons learned. They recognized the Commission's broad scope of work as unique and challenging, and provided their views on how it had impacted policy and development at the national level.

12. Overall, many speakers said that the Commission had demonstrated the importance of having a central United Nations forum entrusted with sustainable development issues.

13. Speakers were unanimous in affirming that the multi-stakeholder approach had proven to be one of the main added values of the Commission. Major groups and the establishment of partnerships had fostered mutual understanding on many issues over the years.

14. The Commission had set the agenda in several areas of sustainable development. It had been successful in paving the way for further implementation of sustainable development within the post-2015 development agenda. Many speakers said that sustainable development should be integrated at the centre of the fight against poverty and should underpin efforts to build more resilient societies.

15. Discussion was also generated on the shortcomings of the Commission on Sustainable Development, namely its inability to address economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated way, and its lack of flexibility to address new and emerging issues. Speakers also referred to the Commission's protracted negotiating sessions and the absence of a mechanism to implement and review the implementation of its outcomes. Lack of commitment by member States to implement its decisions and their own commitments had limited

the impact of the work of the Commission. The need to further integrate the environmental, social and economic dimensions was underscored by many speakers, as was the need for improved means of implementation through the application of clear targets and indicators. Also important were regular reviews by regional commissions, voluntary national reporting and more robust connections at the country level.

16. The need for more flexibility in addressing new and emerging challenges was also underscored. Some speakers noted that giving higher political standing and priority to sustainable development would require broader spaces for participation by major groups and increased attention to interlinkages, notably with the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, in particular the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Population and Development.

17. Several speakers agreed that women's voices should be given more prominence, stressing that the rate of inequality was growing. They urged Governments to address not only gender mainstreaming, but also women's rights, calling for issues of inequality to be addressed at the highest level.

18. Knowledge of the advantages of sustainability within the private sector had also been deepened by the Commission on Sustainable Development, owing to a growing awareness of interconnectedness. Sharing experiences, engaging more strongly with the economic and social dimensions, and institutionalizing the science-policy interface could also be brought to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, where global cooperation could mobilize the resources of the private sector, drive innovation, spur partnerships and bring new standards of engagement with the United Nations.

19. Finally, as young people became more and more involved in sustainable development, their inclusion within country delegations continued to rise and was to be further encouraged moving forward.

20. In closing the Commission, speakers looked forward to an inclusive and effective High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, a Forum that provided the new home for Governments and all stakeholders to cooperate and advance the sustainable development agenda.

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